

# Coping with stress from wildfires

Feelings such as anxiety, constant worrying, trouble sleeping or other depression-like symptoms can be common responses before, during and after wildfires.

Emotional recovery from a wildfire can be challenging. The stress of coping with losses, disruptions and other traumatic events can trigger mood swings, sleep disruption, and cause nervous tension and/or depression. Returning to a home, business, school, or place of worship impacted by a wildfire can also cause emotional distress.



It's important to take care of yourself. Take breaks and take time to acknowledge what you have accomplished, even when there is still much more to do. Process any losses you have experienced with friends and family, and share your hopes and plans. Recognize and reaffirm your strengths. Remember all the ways you managed to overcome previous hardships. When you're ready and able, give back to others. Contributing or volunteering provides you an opportunity to regain a sense of purpose and control.

**When should I seek additional help?** Feeling emotional after a disaster is normal but professional help may be needed if a person experiences any of the following:

- Difficulty managing emotions.
- Trouble completing daily tasks.
- Not being able to care for yourself or your family.
- Worrying a lot of the time; feeling guilty but not sure why.
- Excessive absences from work or school.

**Where can I get help?** Here are helpful resources if you or anyone you know is experiencing difficulties, or for your reference in case of future emergencies:

- **Careline Alaska** is there to help if you or your loved ones are having difficulty coping. For Alaska's statewide, 24/7, free and confidential crisis line, call 1-877- 266-4357 (HELP), or text 4help at 839863. Visit [www.carelinealaska.com](http://www.carelinealaska.com).
- **The Disaster Distress Helpline** provides immediate 24/7, 365-days-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available to all residents in the United States and its territories. Call 1-800-985-5990 toll-free or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to connect with a trained crisis counselor. Visit [www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline)

- **The Red Cross** offers these tips on caring for your emotional health during a disaster: [www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDFs/Be\\_Red\\_Cross\\_Ready/EmotionalHealth.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/content/dam/redcross/atg/PDFs/Be_Red_Cross_Ready/EmotionalHealth.pdf)
- **The American Psychological Association** provides this factsheet on recovering from wildfires: [www.apa.org/helpcenter/wildfire](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/wildfire)
- **Wildfires at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** [www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/wildfires/index.html)
- **Wildfires at the National Child Traumatic Stress Network:** [www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/wildfire-resources](http://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/wildfire-resources)
- **Wildfires at Ready.gov:** [www.ready.gov/wildfires](http://www.ready.gov/wildfires)

**Vulnerable populations:** Pay special attention to the needs of children, older adults or others who may be in your care.

- **Children and teens.** After a wildfire, young people may worry that another one will happen again, especially if they witnessed the fire and the loss of their home. Some children may become withdrawn, while others may become agitated and irritable and display outbursts of anger.
- **Older adults.** Older adults are more likely to need social support to reduce the effects of stress and move forward on the path of recovery. They also may have limited physical mobility and lack independence.

**Things parents can do to help children** affected by wildfires from the American Psychological Association:

- **Spend time with your children.** Affection can be comforting to children who have experienced trauma. They may be more dependent on you than usual for a few months.
- **Provide play experiences to help relieve tension.** Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- **Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings.** This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety about the disaster. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- **Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed.** Help restore a sense of security and normalcy.
- **Reduce the number of times children see the trauma on the news.** Repeatedly watching broadcasts of the disaster can re-traumatize children.

